DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 064 912 EM 010 018

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TITLE Communications and the Urban Crisis: Doing Our Own Thing.
PUB DATE 13 Aug 68
NOTE 15p.; Speech presented to the American Management Association Annual Conference on Education and Training (4th, New York, N.Y., August 13, 1968)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS City Problems; Communication Skills; Disadvantaged Youth; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Technology; *Race Relations; Self Help Programs; Speeches; *Student Needs; Television

ABSTRACT

The urban crisis has sparked two primary needs: 1) orienting formal education to the aural-visual needs and psychological set of the child, rather than to the outmoded administrative ease of the teacher; and 2) educating the majority society to the needs and problems of minority racial groups. Two efforts to meet the first problem are use of media and audiovisual aids and also proposals to reorganize the school system. An additional help would be the establishment of a communications university which would offer training in all fields needing communications expertise. In order to solve the second problem, whites must help blacks help themselves, rather than thinking that whites can solve black problems on their own. Several examples of whites giving blacks leeway to solve their problems are discussed here. Projects combining efforts of government, industry, education, and the community are most likely to solve the urban crisis. (JK)

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COMMUNICATIONS AND THE URBAN CRISIS: DOING OUR OWN THING

An address to the American Management Association
Fourth Annual Conference on Education and Training

August 13, 1968 at the New York Hilton Hotel, New York City

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This has been a year of innovation in the use of communications to meet urban needs. From August, 1967 to August, 1968. The year between the last American Management Association Conference on Education and Training and this one.

(No, Messrs. Trowbridge, Lenoue and Cogan, I am not endorsing the AMA or last year's Conference as the progenitor of achievements in this field--though that Conference may indeed have contributed toward the spark of thought and action. This measurement of time is more a personal one.)

At last year's Conference, as chairman of the general session on "The Revolution in Instructional and Educational Television," I spoke on the needs of the inner-cities, specifically on "Communications and Crisis." At that time virtually no one was talking about the subject, and even less was being done.

Today, however, one year later, we find a general session specifically devoted to the subject of "Education, Training and the Urban Crisis," under the heading of "The Three R's Today--Rights, Revolution and Remedy." Although we all wish that such a topic might be inapplicable to our society, it is gratifying to know that we are making some progress: we have gone beyond the limiting "cool it" approach to "revolution," and are making efforts to understand the "rights" in our title, and to do something about them, to actuate the "remedy" in our title. For example, I suggested last year that a primary task in the inner-city is, through communications, to "make a dent in the curtain of hopelessness that has been pulled down over every black child and adult . . . ghettoized into economic and cultural poverty."

Virtually nothing was being done then. But today we see a beginning, with television and radio materials that provide a sense of history, identification and pride in background for the Afro-American. There have been not only network programs such as "Of Black America," but local programs, by commercial stations and in large part by educational stations, that not only provide a sense of positive identification, but provide, in many instances, the opportunity for the people of the black ghetto to do their own thing by determining the content, by presenting, and by participating in the programs.

I suggested last year that if television, through its typical entertainment programs, continued to show the ghetto man, woman and child the material delights of the suburban promised land, did it not seem logical that television should go on from there and show them how to reach that land. Last year virtually nothing was being done. Today efforts are being made to provide information and educational programs oriented to the special needs and desires of the ghetto community.

But some areas have not progressed so well.

For example, when I use the term ghetto, I do not limit our concerns to the black ghetto. I include the brown ghettos and the white slums and the other minority groups as well. We are saying and doing very little about these other groups, perhaps most obviously about the Spanish speaking ghettos of the north and the barrios of the southwest.

This holds true for content approaches, too.

I suggested last year that educating the disadvantaged is not enough, that if domestic peace and justice are to be achieved, we must also educate the suburbs so that the majority society is ready to break the barriers that still exist against the minority, educated as well as non-educated. Not much has been done in that direction.

For example, let us look at industry education and training. Are we providing opportunities for the educated minority group members to work in executive positions commensurate with their education, or are we putting minority group members into the category of trained, as opposed to educated, personnel? Are we providing on the job education and training not only for minority group people so that they can fit into all areas of our organizations, but perhaps more importantly education and training for the majority group members of our organizations so that minority group members may indeed have the opportunity to fit in?

I stressed last year the need to completely reorient formal education and instruction as it is being largely practiced today. Today's child is not the child of our youth. He is not living in a print-oriented society. He is living in an aural and visual society. For example, by the time a child has graduated from high school he has spent some 10,800 hours in the classroom--and some 15,000 hours in front of the television set. Add to that the countless number of hours a transistor radio is glued to his ear and you have some notion of what he is tuned in to.

It is no accident that last year the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that not a single compensatory education program in the United States has been successful. It is no accident that New York University's celebrated Clinic for Learning in a junior high school in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant section "got the hell kicked out of us" and abandoned its efforts. It is no

accident that millions of dollars are being poured into other similar efforts at special education for disadvantaged urban children and produce little or no positive results. We are communicating with the wrong media.

We must use the mass media not only to provide motivation through visual and aural action rather than through non-meaningful (to that child) print symbols--but we must use the mass media to provide a socializing situation for the child, to make the real world a part of the classroom, to provide the problems of the real world as the learning problems; the solutions learned--or at least the understanding obtained--is what constitutes education.

A comment by Marshall MacLuhan is appropriate here: "All the young are in the same position . . . . The discrepency between the riches of the TV feast and the poverty of the school experience is creating great ferment, friction and psychic violence . . . but the new era and the new violence does not have an end in view . . . it is the process itself that yields the new image. When children go to school they are filled with rage at the puny curriculum . . . the children in Watts were quite right in thinking 'Why should we go to school to interrupt our education?'"

Pertinent to our discussion here today are the words of President Johnson on November 7, 1967, when he signed the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. The President stated that "while we work every day to produce new goods and to create new wealth, we want most of all to enrich man's spirit . . . . Today we rededicate a part of the airwaves--which belong to all the people--for the enlightment of all the people . . . . We must consider new ways to build a great network for knowledge--not just a broadcast system, but one that employs every means of sending and of storing information that the individual can use.

Think of the lives that this would change." He added that: "Government funding is both right and essential . . . but . . . private sector responsibility. . . is as great as that of the government."

By stressing two areas: 1) orienting formal education to the aural-visual needs and psychological set of the child, rather than to the outmoded administrative ease of the teacher; and 2) educating the majority society, I am not ignoring other needs. We need much better use of the media to provide direct information and education to the residents of the ghetto, with materials that they develop and that are developed to their needs and understanding; we need much more use of the media to enable the ghetto to communicate with itself, not only communication into the ghetto, but communication within the ghetto; we need greater use of the media for communication from the ghetto, to enable the residents of the inner-city to "tell it like it is" to suburbia, to the rest of the world that thinks it knows, but by and large has been given only the intellectual skimming of a situation and problems that have deep emotional roots.

But today, because of the relatively short time I have to speak with you, I want to enlarge, briefly, on just the two areas of formal education and majority education.

We don't have to rehash the problems of our educational system. Suffice to say that we have, by and large, one of the best educational systems of the nineteenth century. There are, however, some attempts being made to make it a good system of the twentieth century--the kind of system needed before we can effectively use communications in formal education to meet the needs of our urban crisis. I will mention only a few.

One such attempt may be the current Title III study, authorized by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, being conducted by the Office of Education of HEW. This study is well under way, analyzing instructional television and radio, including broadcast, closed-circuit, CATV, ITFS, and two-way communications of data links and computers, and their relationship to each other and to instructional materials such as videotapes, films, discs, computers and other devices. If the study results, as many people expect, in recommendations to Congress for legislation and for an instructional communications act similar to the Public Broadcasting Act; if such legislation--and sufficient appropriations--are passed; and if these media, properly funded, are then used as the realistically principal bases of communications in education--and not, as now used, as reinforcement of 19th century methods and techniques--then we may be on our way to one significant remedy for the urban crisis.

Another approach is evidenced in the recently released statement on national policy by the research and policy committee of the Committee on Economic Development. In a study entitled "Innovation in Education: New Directions for the American School," the CED recommends reorganization of the American school for innovation and change, increased emphasis on research, dissemination and application, use of cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis in the schools and--perhaps most immediately pertinent to our discussion here--the establishment by Congress, as an independent, non-governmental agency, a Commission on Research, Innovation and Evaluation in Education. Such a Commission might very well provide the impetus and even persuasion to change our educational system for effective use of communications--again permitting application of an important remedy to urban crisis.

A third area I would like to discuss, briefly, with you, is one that is somewhat different from the first two.

For some time I have felt that one of the reasons we were not yet using the communications media to their fullest potential was because we have not been adequately prepared to do so. Most of us in the communications field have come into it from either another discipline, have been educated in only a small portion of it, or have been limited to broad and imcomplete overviews of it.

There is not, in this country or anywhere in the world, a single center that offers to the student, to the communications industry, to government, to education, to the professions, to all the varied fields needing communications expertise, the kinds of communications training, experiences and services most vitally needed today. There are so many needs: international service; socio-political, including urban, applications; management and industry production, distribution, sales, training; federal government agencies; state and local governments; nongovernmental professional and citizen organizations; many specialized fields such as medicine, religion, law; and others.

If we are to make greatest use of the potential of the mass media, we have got to give them the resources, respect and prestige of other fields, and provide them with personnel of the highest quality.

Just as the future scientist can go to M.I.T. or Cal Tech, shouldn't the future communicator also have a high quality University to learn in, in a field that is at least as important to the future of the world as are the disciplines now learned at MIT and Cal Tech?

About a year ago I first proposed the establishment of a Communications University to provide the needed education and services. In the past few months, particularly, the response and support have been highly encouraging.

Within this Communications University I have proposed two special institutes: An Institute of International Communications, and an Institute of Urban Communications. In addition, the University should have a first quality research center; a workshop, conference and convention center; a special training center for government personnel; consultant services to all potential users in all areas, including such things as systems planning; a production center for all communications needs; a special center for innovative experiment and application; and, perhaps most important of all, the highest quality inter-disciplinary undergraduate and graduate degree and non-degree programs.

I believe that one of the most significant educational investments we can make today is to establish a Communications University maintaining the highest academic standards and services, not only for transmitting ideas, but for relating people with people, and for reaching people with both content and non-content motivation.

I believe such a University could have great positive value in meeting the immediate and ultimate needs of urban America as well as the needs of other geographical and sociological areas of the world.

One highly relevant point in terms of our particular discussion here today: such a University should be--would have to be--developed through the cooperative efforts of government, education, industry, and foundations.

I shall not take time here to discuss other efforts in the area of communications and formal education. What is important is our individual commitment to an active role in supporting one or more of these efforts if we believe that communications and education are indeed remedies for the urban crisis.

The second major area that I propose to discuss with you today is that of educating the majority society. In the vernacular, it is "doing our own thing." White America, the majority population, has always been the major factor in determining the status and activity of black America. This is changing. It is a significant change. It is a change that recognizes the kind of independence, self-determinism and self-realization that the American Management Association, for example, is dedicated to. Paternalism and handouts, in no matter what form of altruism or sincerity, are not the answer many people once thought they were. Black Americans more and more want to do their own thing, want the pride and self-respect of making their own progress.

Something occurring right now at the Dalton School here in New York may provide some insights into what is happening. The Parents-Teachers organization of this private school of good reputation, located in the affluent Park Avenue and 89th Street area, sponsored a program to bring parents of children at that school and parents of special school 201 in Harlem together to learn how to help their children learn to read better. "A more satisfactory way than writing checks," one of the sponsoring parents said. The $26.40 costs paid by each Dalton parent were not charged the parents from Harlem. What disappointment for the white parents, then, when only 13 of the expected 40 parents from Harlem showed up--13 out of a total of 100 adults in the program! How to explain this? Rationalization? Condemnation? Frustration? Listen:

A recent article in The New York Times quoted one young man as saying "We don't say keep whites out of our lives, but we say make black people so strong they can do their thing--whatever their thing is--by themselves." Another was quoted as saying: "Black people want black control of their lives and activities more than anything else. If they make mistakes, let them be black mistakes--we're tired of white mistakes in our lives."

Isn't this the kind of independence and privilege--the kind of right--that most of us in the majority society have always taken for granted for ourselves?

Where does that leave many of us who strongly believe that we, as individuals, not only can help alleviate the urban crisis, but perhaps even have a responsibility to do so? The same Times article contains another quote, expressing a growing sentiment among minority group people, that gives us a clue: "The missionary area for white people is not in ghettos, but in white suburbia."

The Republican candidate for president and the major Democratic candidates for the presidental nomination have all, in varying degrees, supported the principle of economic self-determinism, control and development by the ghetto people within the ghettos. An example in current practice is the Xerox program in Rochester, in which the Corporation has agreed to underwrite the development of a black-owned and operated plant, and would guarantee purchase, for Xerox needs, of a certain amount of the plant's product.

In other words, those of us who are concerned about the urban crisis and want to do something about it, might consider whether our best efforts might not now be oriented toward a new approach: doing our own thing.

We have seen recently, in communications, several initial efforts on a large scale that seem to recognize the validity and value of this approach. Some of these efforts have been through mass media programs aimed toward white suburbia understanding of the needs and problems of the inner-cities. Others have been on an organization scale.

For example, very recently, after many months of planning and work, the Office of Economic Opportunity established a government-industry-education-community project in a midwest city. The state bar association, a respected,

somewhat conservatively oriented organization, wished to alleviate the urban crisis by presenting materials dealing with the legal rights and responsibilities of ghetto residents. Their first approach was to develop the ideas and to have them produced by an outside organization. The results were less than satisfactory. Finally, it was decided that each group concerned would do their own thing. OEO coordinated and funded the project; the bar association, in cooperation with a ghetto organization (a black nationalist group, by the way), determined the basic problem areas; the bar association, on its own, developed the legal approaches to be used; the black citizens group, on its own, produced the communications materials for mass distribution.

At the Federal Communications Commission, last month, we did our own thing in acting to enforce compliance by broadcasters with laws on non-discrimination in employment. The FCC also proposed new rules to aid in enforcement and--in what the Commission called the most important part of its order--appealed to broadcasters to assist through both employment and programming policies in easing the national racial crisis. We trust industry will cooperate with government in achieving these goals.

In Canada a highly dramatic plan is evolving, one which is being studied carefully by one of our government agencies to determine applicability to the needs of our disadvantaged citizens. Briefly stated, the National Film Board of Canada, in cooperation with Memorial University of Newfoundland and the community of Fogo Island, filmed in depth the problems and people of Fogo Island, then played back these films to the people to help reveal, modify and develop individual and group attitudes. The entire community was involved at all stages in decisions to be made and in the entire process of self-analysis and

problem solving. The people selected the topics, participated in editing decisions, and determined the extent of distribution. Some of the goals include developing insights into community problems and a desire by the community to act on them, the fostering of more effective community-education-government cooperation, and the promoting of greater understanding and a desire for action in communities with similar problems by showing the films there.

The basic approach, used in this country, might be of great value in achieving government-industry-education-community cooperative efforts, each doing that which it can do best, to establish important communication links among the disadvantaged minorities, and between these people and majority groups.

Finally, I want to mention just one more effort within our own government. Many of our government agencies have been making strong efforts to meet the needs of the inner-cities. Last month, the Federal Interagency Broadcast Committee, consisting of representatives of thirty-two federal departments and agencies with communication responsibilities, recommended the establishment of a Communications Liaison Office on Minority Group Matters. This office, if established, would, among other things, cooperate with industry and other public and private organizations in facilitating the development, distribution and use of materials oriented toward minority group needs, specifically including the needs of the urban ghettos. The agencies would be encouraged and assisted in diversifying materials, not only for informing minority groups of services available to them, but materials which would assist intra-minority group communications, and materials which would be aimed toward educating the majority society on the special problems and needs of minority groups. The Office would also develop a broadcasting skills bank of minority group personnel so that agencies, through employment of more minority group members,

could have more direct and sensitive knowledge than many now have on needs and problems and on effectively communicating with minority groups. This office would also encourage greater use of minority group performers in materials prepared for distribution.

These various cooperative approaches and projects we have been discussing are significant in that they do not attempt to dictate to urban minorities, do not try to tell the ghetto people what they should do, or try to do it for them. They do attempt to provide resources and opportunities for the urban people to do their own thing.

There has been a hopeful beginning over the past year. Much of the broadcasting activity was evident during and following the April disruptions in our inner-cities. Let us hope that continuing activity includes a recognition that "rights" and "remedies" go beyond disorders, and that the "cool-it" kind of program is only a last resort indicating that we have failed in the more important aspects of communication. (For an analogy let's consider one of the remarkable ironies in our society. There always seems to be enough money and support to build prisons: you can't leave lawbreakers loose in the streets. But try to get money and support to provide the education and training and necessities and opportunities that will lessen the need for jails, and be less costly in human and material resources in the long run, and it is not quite so easy.) Many good programs on television and radio have been seen and heard this summer. Let us hope that they will not disappear once the rerun season is over.

This day, this session at the American Management Association is evidence of a desire and, perhaps we can hope, a commitment to move ahead to more and better government-industry-education-community projects to meet the

urban crisis. Not only for providing a communications base for formal education, and for reaching the majority society, the two areas I have concentrated on, but for the various other needs and approaches, as well.

But what is especially significant for us as individuals is to realize that none of us need to face real or imagined uncooperative roadblocks in trying to reach people who may feel we do not understand them, and in trying to do things for people that we may feel they do not understand.

Unless we are ready to reorient our philosophy to the practical considerations of getting the job done in terms of the realistic requirements of the situation, all of our most sophisticated and sincere education and training programs will be of little value. Some of the projects I have described may indicate some worthwhile directions and opportunities. Some of our best and most effective help in alleviating the urban crisis can come by providing inner-city control of projects and by inner-city / orienting much of our effort toward our own/organizations and activities, toward our own milieu, toward the people we can most readily reach . . . by--simply--doing our own thing!